At-Home Rapid Testing Program
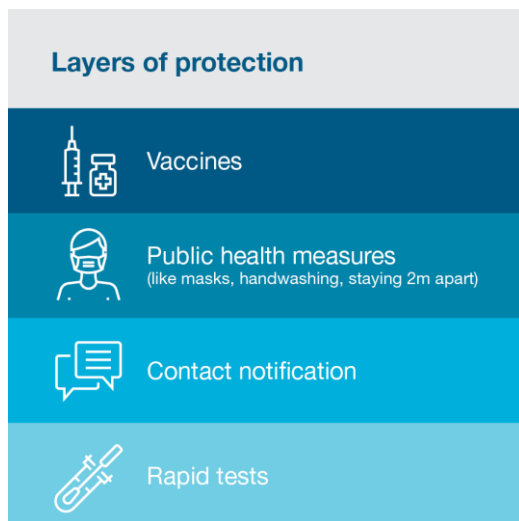
Information for on reserve parents, students and school staff

How the program works

Alberta Education's Kindergarten to Grade 6 At-Home Rapid Testing Program has been extended to include all K4 to Grade 12 students attending First Nation Education Authority schools on reserve. Partnership opportunities and programs supported by Alberta Education are intended to enhance, not replace, federal government programs. Parents can choose to test their children in their homes if their school is participating in the program. Staff can also test themselves at home.

Outbreak status is not required for on reserve schools wanting to participate in the program. Rapid screening tests are another tool, along with health measures already in place at schools, to keep students and staff safe.

Layers of protection

Vaccines

Public health measures
(like masks, handwashing, staying 2m apart)

Contact notification

Rapid tests

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the rapid testing program is optional. The tests are only for staff/students who do not have symptoms of COVID-19. If they test positive, they can be isolated early to stop the spread.

Students and staff who choose to participate will receive 10 rapid tests (two packages of five tests) produced by a company called BTNX. Rapid tests are to be used twice a week for five weeks. Testing is recommended to be done three to four days apart; for example, on Monday and Thursday or Tuesday and Friday. There is no requirement for students or staff to report their rapid test results.

Only 10 BTNX rapid tests per student or staff member will be initially provided.

Rapid tests are designed to be used as a screening tool for individuals who are asymptomatic (do not have symptoms). If a student or staff member participating in the program starts to display symptoms of COVID-19 throughout the rapid testing program, they should book a PCR test at an Alberta Health Services (AHS) assessment centre or through the local health centre.

The rapid tests provided by Alberta Health as part of this program cannot be used by school staff to support a restrictions exemption program. Unvaccinated staff members who wish to enter an organization participating in a restriction exemption program must pay to obtain a negative COVID-19 test through a private vendor.

Who can take part

All students who attend an on reserve school are eligible to receive test kits. Non-school age children and family members are not eligible. Schools will determine how to send the tests home. It is safe for children to put them in their backpacks.

How to use the test kits

A how-to video for parents and staff is available on alberta.ca/return to school. The company, BTNX, also has a how-to video you can watch.

A rapid screening test nasal swab is only inserted 1.5 to 2.0 cm inside the nostril and is typically more comfortable, less invasive and less irritating than the swab usually used for a PCR COVID-19 test at an AHS testing centre.

If you are eligible to take part in the At-Home Rapid Test Program, you (or your child) will receive two test kit packages (10 tests in total).

Each test kit comes with:

- a sterile swab that looks like a Q-tip;

- a tube and a stand;

- a nozzle with a filter; and

- a plastic container with a small amount of liquid inside.

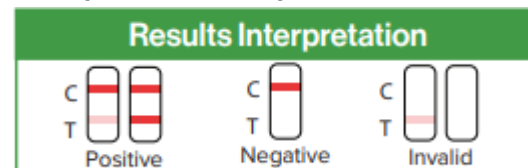A test will take about 20 minutes to complete.

STEPS FOR DOING THE TEST

1. Before you do the test, wash your hands with soap and water. The person being tested should blow their nose into a tissue and discard it.

2. Unpack all of the test materials from the kit. Pour the testing liquid into the test tube.

3. Take the sterile swab out of the package carefully. Make sure it does not touch anything.

4. Insert the swab 1.5 to 2.0 cm inside the nostril. Move the swab in a circle for at least five seconds. Then, press the nostril down against the swab and spin the tip for five more seconds.

5. Using the same swab, do the same thing in the other nostril.

6. Next, put the swab in the test tube with the testing liquid. Make sure the swab tip is fully covered by the liquid.

7. Set a timer for two minutes to let the swab contents mix with the test fluid.

8. When the two minutes are up, pinch the tube so that you squeeze as much liquid as possible out of the swab.

9. Throw the swab in the garbage.

10. Place the filter nozzle on the test tube.

11. Turn the tube over and squeeze three drops of the solution into the spot marked 'S' on the test device.

12. Set a new timer for 15 minutes. Once 15 minutes are up, check your test results.

Once you are finished, you can throw the test away.

Results

Example of BTNX Rapid Test Results

Negative results

A negative result does not guarantee someone does not have COVID-19 or will not become infected later. However, a negative test will give peace of mind to the family that their child can attend school.

Since you are taking the test twice per week (allowing for three days between tests), it is less likely there will be a false negative result.

It is important to follow all public health measures: physical distancing, wearing a mask, remaining in cohorts and washing hands regularly.

Positive results

If there is a positive rapid test result, the student or staff member will safely isolate at home for 10 days from the date the test was completed unless they receive a subsequent COVID-19 lab test from AHS or the community health centre with a negative result.

A positive rapid test result cannot confirm someone has COVID-19. Only a more accurate lab-based COVID-19 test an AHS testing site or community health centre can confirm a COVID-19 infection.

Staff and students with a positive rapid screening test result should book an appointment for a COVID-19 test online at www.ahs.ca/covid or call Health Link at 811 as soon as possible or contact the community health centre.

You do not have to report the results of the rapid tests to the school or AHS; however, you should contact the community health centre if there is a positive result

If something goes wrong with the test

If something went wrong with the test, you won't see any lines—or you may see a line next to the 'T'.

If that happens, you can throw the test away and start over. You can get a new test from the school.

If a student or staff tested positive for COVID-19 in the past

If someone tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 90 days, they should not participate in this program. Some people who have recovered from COVID-19 may continue to test positive in a rapid screening test for up to 90 days, even though they are no longer infectious.

COVID-19 and variants

Only PCR tests can confirm if a person has COVID-19 and if it is a variant of concern. These are the tests done at an AHS assessment centre/community health centre.

How accurate are rapid tests?

Rapid screening tests are not as accurate as lab-based tests done through an AHS assessment centre or testing available through the community health centre. The likelihood of someone with no symptoms having a false positive result from a rapid test is low. However, all positive results from a rapid screening test need to be confirmed by an approved lab test.

You will need to go to an AHS assessment centre or your community health centre if you or your child test positive. The likelihood of someone with no symptoms having a false negative result is higher. A negative result on a rapid screening test does not mean that person is not infected or could not become infectious.

When a rapid test is used in people without symptoms, it is a screening test, not a diagnostic test. Screening individuals with rapid tests can identify some, but not all, contagious individuals and, as a result, rapid screening does not replace public health measures such as physical distancing, masking, hand hygiene, staying home and accessing testing when sick and the mandatory isolation of COVID-19 cases.

If you have more questions

If you have questions about this school rapid screening test program, please email EDC.SchoolRapidTesting@gov.ab.ca.

For the latest COVID-19 information visit www.alberta.ca/Covid19.

If you have questions regarding test results or health outcomes, please contact Health Link at 811.